

Letter and enclosure from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, May 3, 1908, with transcript

Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel (Hubbard) Bell Hammondsport, N. Y. Sunday, May 3, 1908. My darling Mabel:

It seems an age since I left Washington and I have not received one word from you since I left. I feel awfully lonely — wish you would write or send a telegram to say you are all right. We have been having nothing but rain and snow since I arrived. Cold, raw, damp weather — and no fire in my room. My presence here cannot advance the experiments — so far as they are concerned, can do nothing more than loaf — and whiff. It's an awful waste of my time — and if I had not a letter to prepare about Volta Bureau affair to present at the meeting of the A.A.P.T.S.D. at Rochester on May 6th, I would feel that the proper thing to do would be to return home or run up to Baddeck and start things there for the summer.

Baldwin's Aerodrome "White Wing" is practically complete — only waiting for a couple of bicycle wheels to be attached — and then it will be ready for trial. Mr. Augustus Post, Secretary of the Aero Club of America, is here — and is so much interested that he will wait here for the trial which can not be much longer delayed — and I will hang on here too — to see the trial. The machine is a great improvement upon Selfridge's Red-wing — chiefly in matters of lateral and longitudinal control — but the machine is distinctly of the dangerous kind — requiring a great deal 2 of skill in the operator. It is unfortunate that such a machine has to be operated — at first — with an unskilled men on board. I have no doubt that it will fly — but whether it will come down safely without injury to the man on board, is a problem which can only be settled by experiment. The young men here are prepared to take risks — and there is no reason why they should not be as successful as the French experiment. Quite a number of flights have been made with machines of this type — by the Wright Brothers in America and by Farman, Dela Grauge, Bleriot, Vaia and

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etc., etc., in France — and as yet no fatal accident has occurred, nor have the operators been injured by the accidents to their machines — so that this fact is encouraging. For my own part I should prefer to take my chances in a tetrahedral aerodrome — going more slowly — and over water. However I have not the heart to throw a damper over the ambitious attempts of the young men associated with me. I feel that in a very few days now America may be ringing with their praises — and they certainly deserve success, and will obtain it too — I have no doubt.

I leave here on the fifth, and return on the seventh. I am only afraid that the trial may be made while I am absent.

“The cat came back”

Selfridge, being unable to obtain my signature to the bill presented to the War Department, for light and heat supplied to him while our guest at Beinn Bhreagh, has handed 3 over the whole matter to the War Department. I enclose copy of note received from Amos. W. Kimball, Major and Quartermaster U. S. Army — Assistant — sending back the voucher for my signature, and a copy of my reply.

Your loving husband, Alec.

Copy of letter to Alexander Graham Bell from Amos W. Kimball, Major and Quartermaster, U. S. Army. War Department, Office of the Depot Quartermaster, New York City. April 27th, 1908. Mr. A. G. Bell, 1331 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D. C. Sir:

The enclosed voucher for heat and light allowances due 1st. Lieut T. Selfridge, 1st Field Artillery, U. S. Army, was returned to this office by Lieut. Selfridge with explanation that for certain reasons you could not see your way clear to sign it.

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In this connection you are advised that under existing regulations no method is open by which an officer can recover commuted value of these allowances, other than that expressed on face of voucher. These regulations read in part as follows:

“Where an officer x x x occupies quarters other than public which are lighted by x x x and the quantity supplied is not measured by separate meter readings, the Quartermaster's Department will make settlement with the owner or authorized agent for light for the number of rooms to which the rank of the officer x x x entitles him, in accordance with the prescribed allowance.”

The same regulations apply to the settlement of an officer's heat allowance.

Under the circumstances Lieut. Selfridge cannot be paid the commuted value of his heat and light allowances between September 1st, and December 11th, 1907, unless the regulations referred to are complied with. This requires 2 your signature to inclosed voucher and its return to this office. Otherwise it would result in a loss to the officer of the amount involved.

By direction of the Depot Quartermaster.

Respectfully, (Signed) Amos. W. Kimball, Major and Quartermaster, U. S. Army. Assistant.

Copy of reply to Amos W. Kimball from Alexander Graham Bell. Hammondsport, N. Y. May 1, 1908. Amos W. Kimball, U. S. Army, New York City. My dear Sir:

Permit me to thank you for your courteous note of the 27th of April, which has been forwarded to me here.

You say that unless I sign the voucher enclosed — “Lieut. Selfridge cannot be paid the commuted value of his heat and light allowances between September 1st and December 11th, 1907.”

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I had not understood this before, nor am I certain that I understand it now, for I am under the impression that any cheque in settlement of this account would be made payable to my order , and not to Lieut. Selfridge. Kindly inform me how this may be for I have no objection to signing the voucher if the money is to be paid to Lieut. Selfridge.

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The voucher relates to services rendered Lieut. Selfridge by supplying him with light and heat, while he was a guest at my summer home in Nova Scotia in 1907. Of course neither Mrs. Bell nor I could accept payment for that, and could only return any cheque sent — to the sender .

If the cheque is to be made payable to my order, I must decline to sign the voucher, for it would put me in the ridiculous position of signing a requisition for money which I have no intention of receiving.

On the other hand if the money is to be paid directly to Lieut. Selfridge as the commuted value of his heat and light allowance I would have no objection to certifying to the correctness of his account.

Kindly let me know whether the cheque is settlement would be made payable to my order, or to Lieut. Selfridge and oblige.

Yours sincerely, (Signed) Alexander Graham Bell.